

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

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MENTZELIA LINDLEYI

BLAZING STAR

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

MENTZELIA LINDLEYI

BLAZING STAR

Loasaceae

Loasa Family

A large erect annual growing from 1 to 4 ft. high, often simple or spreading to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. Herbage light green, covered with short barbed hairs. Lower leaves often 6 to 8 in. long, irregularly, coarsely pinnatifid. Flowers showy, borne 1 to 4 at the tips of short axillary branches, these usually congested at the tips of the plant to form compound clusters. Buds conical, $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long. Sepals 5, green, turning yellow. Petals 5, rotately spreading, forming a flat flower, obovate, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, rounded at the apex and with a distinct cusp or point, golden yellow except for the burnt orange base which in the open flower forms a ring about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter. The silken texture of the petals enhances the beauty. Stamens about 100, forming a conspicuous mound in the center of the flower, filaments about $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, color as in the petals, the base being darker. Anthers small. Ovary inferior, 1-celled, style 1, about 1 in. long, erect. Capsule 1 to 2 in. long, fleshy when immature, becoming membranous, dehiscent at apex. Seeds small, numerous, prismatic.

Mentzelia lindleyi was first described in 1836 by Lindley, an English botanist, under the name Bartonia aurea from plants grown from seeds obtained by David Douglas, under which name it is still sometimes known in cultivation. However, the former name given by Torrey and Gray honoring Lindley is the accepted one today. The genus Mentzelia was proposed by Linnaeus in honor of C. Mentzel, a German botanist. There are close to 60 species, distributed in the American tropics, sub-tropics and temperate regions. More than a dozen kinds are known in California being largely confined to the arid or desert regions. Mentzelia lindleyi is one of the showiest and is confined to the Mt. Hamilton Range and the central Sierra Nevada foothills. Another western species is M. laevicaulis (Evening Star) with large, pale yellow flowers, but it is difficult to cultivate and is a biennial or perennial with flowers closed during the day.

Few people have seen Blazing Star in the wild, since it is comparatively rare. It inhabits coarse or rocky, sunny slopes,

usually forming small colonies. It occurs in the Upper Sonoran Zone (10 to 15 in. rainfall) at elevations of usually less than 4000 ft. Wild plants bloom from April to June.

Blazing Stars were early introduced into cultivation in England and are known to a limited extent in the eastern United States. In California they are little known except in the occasional plots of mixed wild flowers, usually grown from wild flower seed mixtures. This is one of the most beautiful of the yellow flowered California wild flowers, and makes a brilliant and pleasing display. As a cut flower it has fine lasting qualities. Buds open for several days after cutting so the mass of color is increased. If used in conjunction with blue flowers such as some of the Gilias or Phacelias, the contrasting colors make a lovely combination.

Cultivation of Blazing Stars is comparatively easy and is almost always successful. Seed should be planted in the early fall or not later than February in Southern California. A sunny site should be selected. Light soils are preferred, but medium heavy soils will do, provided they are well drained. Since the seeds are small they are best planted on the surface of freshly prepared soil and then gently watered. Transplanting is not successful. Under cultivation the plants will reach heights of over 3 ft. and will bloom over a period of about two months, beginning in early April. Considerable water should be applied up to the time the plants are in full bloom, after which little if any should be given. Abundant seed may be obtained if the plants are allowed to mature. If the site is well suited to Blazing Stars they will re-seed themselves and spring up within a couple of weeks after the first fall rains. As with other flowers, especially California wild flowers, it is essential to remove weeds early and always.

This is a splendid plant for many sunny gardens and should always be included in any planting of mixed wild flowers. Since it blooms early in the spring it may be followed by the usual plants of Asters, Zinnias, Marigolds or other summer annuals.

Seeds may be obtained readily from several of the dealers in California wild flower seeds, and are also stocked by some of the general seed houses.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted
to the growth and study of the native plants
of California for their botanical, horticult-
ural and popular features.

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